YOU HAVE HEARD THE OLD SAYING "PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH" AND ITS COUNTERPART, "DON'T DO AS I DO, DO AS I SAY." THESE TWO CLICHE'S PRETTY WELL SUM UP THE GREATEST PROBLEM CONFRONTING THE CHURCH TODAY, THE SPLIT BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE. ON ALL LEVELS OF CHURCH LIFE ONE CAN OBSERVE THIS SEPARATION, CHURCH MEMBERS READILY ADMIT THAT THEY FALL SHORT WHEN ATTEMPTING TO PUT INTO PRACTICE THE LOFTY OBJECTIVES THEY VOICE ON SUNDAY. FOR THE MOST PART, ~~HOWEVER~~ BUT, WHAT IS SAID AND DONE IN CHURCH STAYS THERE AND AS WE GO OUT THE DOOR WE DISCARD THE CONFESSIONS AND PROMISES WE HAVE MADE AS IF WE WERE BRUSHING A PIECE OF LINT OFF OUR CLOTHING.

ON THE SCHOLARLY LEVEL HUNDREDS OF MEN ARE DABBLING IN THE FIELD OF THEOLOGY, BUT ONE HAS TO SEARCH ~~DILIGENTLY~~ CAREFULLY TO FIND A BOOK ON CHRISTIAN ETHICS.

IT JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO BE IMPORTANT--HOW WE LIVE AND BEHAVE SIX DAYS A WEEK IS IRRELEVANT AS LONG AS WE DO OUR DUTY ON SUNDAY.

ONE HAS ONLY TO SCAN THROUGH THE LETTERS OF SAINT PAUL, HOWEVER, TO DISCOVER HOW RADICALLY UNCHRISTIAN THIS STATE OF AFFIRS IS. IN EACH OF HIS WRITINGS PAUL DEVOTES A SECTION TO DESCRIBING TO HIS READERS HOW A CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE-HAVE, WHAT OBLIGATIONS HE HAS SINCE HE HAS CALLED JESUS CHRIST HIS LORD. ~~TODAY THIS IS A THORN~~

TODAY THIS IS A THORNY PROBLEM. MANY GROUPS OF CHRISTIANS FIND IT EXPEDIENT TO INVENT THEIR OWN RULES. SOME SAY YOU MUST NOT PLAY CARDS, OTHERS SAY YOU CANNOT GO TO MOVIES, OTHERS SAY SMOKING IS OUT, THE AMISH DON'T DRIVE CARS, SOME MORE WORLDLY OF

THEIR GROUP THINK IT IS ALLOWD IF THE CAR IS BLACK. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, IT IS AN INDIVIDUAL MATTER, ONE THAT MUST BE APPROACHED SINCERELY AND SERIOUSLY BY EVERYONE THAT PROFESSES TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME WE FIND SOME OF THE LOFTIEST THEOLOGY ANYWHERE IN THE BIBLE. AT THE TIME OF ITS WIRTING PAUL HAD NEVER BEEN TO ROME, SO HIS LETTER WAS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT. IN THE FIRST ELEVEN CHAPTERS HE BUILDS A FINELY CONSTRUCTED BRIDGEWORK, CAREFULLY WORDED, PROBING DEEP WITH THE MEANING OF CHRISTIANITY AND INTO THE SOUL OF MAN. BUT THIS IS NOT ALL, EVEN TO THIS GROUP OF MEN, NONE OF WHOM HE HAD EVER SEEN, PAUL GIVES DIRECTION ON HOW TO LIVE AS A CHRISTIAN. IT IS THE BEGINNING OF THIS "ETHICAL" SECTION THAT WAS THE SCRIPTURE LESSON THIS MORNING. IN IT PAUL ISSUES TWO CRUCIAL IDEAS, THAT ARE WELL WORTH CONSIDERING.

KEEP IN MIND AGAIN THAT HE DIDN'T KNOW THESE PEOPLE, AS A MATTER OF FACT HE PROBABLY WAS COMPLETELY UNFAMILIAR WITH THEIR PARTICULAR SITUATION, THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PRESSURES THEY FACED, THE MAKE UP OF THE CONGREGATION AND SO ON. BECAUSE OF THIS HIS WORDS ARE PARTICULARLY MEANINGFUL TO US AND TO ALL CHRISTIANS.

WE COULD PERHAPS CALL THESE TWO THOUGHTS THE TWO PREREQUISITES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, OR THE FIRST TWO STEPS IN LIVING LIKE A CHRISTIAN.

IN THE FIRST VERSE OF THE 12th CHAPTER HE SAYS, "I APPEAL TO YOU BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP."

PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A SACRIFICE, A LIVING SACRIFICE. TAKEN BY THEMSELVES THESE ARE STRANGE AND DEMANDING WORDS, WHAT DO THEY MEAN? HOW COULD THEY APPLY TO US?

PAUL WAS A JEW. HIS REAL NAME WAS THAT OF ONE OF THE GREATEST KINGS IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY--SAUL. AND NO ORDINARY JEW WAS HE. HE WAS BORN INTO THE PHARISAICAL CLASS, THE MOST DEVOUT, LEARNED AND LEGALIST OF ALL THE JEWISH PEOPLE. AS YOU KNOW, AT THE TIME OF HIS CONVERSION HE WAS DOING ALL HE COULD TO DESTROY THE TINY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN.

PAUL RIGHTLY SAW THE LINK BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM AND THROUGHOUT HIS VAST MINISTRY HE DEALS WITH ISSUES ANDPROBLEMS ARISING OUT OF THIS RELATIONSHIP. AND SO FROM THE LAW BOOKS OF JUDAISM AND FROM THE HISTORY OF HIS PEOPLE PAUL INTRODUCES THE WORD SACRIFICE TO HIS READERS.

TO THE JEWS THE SACRIFICIAL ACT WAS THE CENTRAL AND MOST IMPORTANT PART OF WORSHIP. WHEN THEY GATHERED TO WORSHIP THEY WOULD SING PRAISES, READ FROM THE LAW AND PERFORM THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THEIR RITUAL AND FINALLY PRESENT TYEIR SACRIFICE TO THE LORD. THE SACRIFICE WAS NOT AN END IN ITSELF, BUT WAS A SYMBOLIC ACT, REPRESENTING THE DEDICATION OF THEIR LIVES TO GOD. WHEN THEY OFFERED A SHEEP OR A GOAT, THEY WERE NOT MERELY GIVING GOD A DEAD ANIMAL. BY KILLING THE ANIMAL AND LETTING ITS BLOOD, THE XXX SYMBOL OF LIFE, FLOW OVER THE ALTAR THEY WERE IN ESSENCE PRESENTING THEIR OWN LIVES TO GOD.

THIS WAS THE HIGH POINT OF THE RITUAL, THIS WAS THE ULTIMATE MAN COULD DO, LAY DOWN HIS LIFE BEFORE GOD, WITHOUT RESERVATION PROMISING TO DO GOD'S WILL ALL THE DAYS OF ~~THEIR~~ HIS LIFE.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT PAUL IS ASKING THE CHRISTIANS IN ROME TO DO. BUT NOW ~~THERE~~ THERE IS NO NEED TO SACRIFICE AN ANIMAL, THEY MUST GO DIRECTLY TO GOD PRESENTING THEMSELVES, ~~THEIR~~ THEIR OWN LIVES. THIS IS THE FIRST THING A CHRISTIAN MUST DO. HAVING DONE THIS, A WAY OF LIVING WILL BECOME CLEAR.

TODAY PAUL'S APPEAL FOR A SACRIFICIAL ACT IS NO LESS IMPORTANT. IT STILL IS THE CENTRAL ACT OF WORSHIP: IT IS THAT PART TOWARD WHICH, EVERYTHING ELSE POINTS. OUR HYMNS, CONFESSIONS, PRAYERS AND SERMONS ARE ALL SECONDARY TO THE TIME WHEN WE PRESENT OURSELVES TO GOD.

THIS IS WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE DESIGNATE THE LAST PORTION OF THE SERVICE AS THE ACT OF DEDICATION. IN OUR OFFERING WE ARE PRESENTING OUR LIVES TO GOD, IN THE PRAYER OF DEDICATION WE NOT ONLY ASK GOD TO ACCEPT THESE OUR GIFTS, BUT TO ACCEPT OUR LIVES, FOR WE HAVE PLACED THEM ON THE ALTAR ALSO. THEY TOO ARE AT HIS DISPOSAL.

ON THE WHOLE WE GREATLY UNDER EMPHASIZE THIS MOST IMPORTANT PART OF WORSHIP. IN MOST CHURCHES IT COMES BEFORE THE SERMON AND IN THIS SENSE THE SERMON BECOMES THE

CENTER OF WORSHIP. IT IS NOT, I ASSUME THAT IS THE REASON THE OFFERING WAS LAST WHEN I CAME HERE, IT IS THE REASON I HAVE LEFT IT THERE.

THAT TIME IN WORSHIP IS USUALLY CHARACTERIZED BY SHUFFLING AND JINGLING, SIGHNS OF RELIEF AND COUGHING, IF THERE IS ANYONE PORTION OF WORSHIP THAT IS NOT SURROUNDED BY REVEREANCE IT IS THE OFFERING. WHEN THIS IS THE CASE WE HAVE ENTIRELY MISSED THE POINT OF CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP.

THE CLIMAX TO ALL WE DO AND SAY HERE IS THE MINUTE WE DEDICATE OUR GIFTS AND OURSELVES TO GOD. WE ARE SAYING, THAT IN ALL HUMILITY AND REVERENCE WE HAVE FOUND IT NECESSARY TO REDEDICATE OUR LIVES TO OUR LORD, AND IT IS OUR HOPEFUL PRAYER THAT THEY WILL BE ACCEPTABLE IN HIS SIGHT.

WE HAVE GIVEN OUR LIVES, IN DOING THIS WE HAVE PROMISED TO SEEK UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WILL AND HAVING DISCOVERED IT TO DO IT. THIS IS NO SMALL THING WE ARE DOING, INDEED IT IS THE CLIMAX OF WORSHIP.

HAVING DESCRIBED ~~LAID~~ DOWN THE FIRST PRECEPT IN LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE PAUL THEN TURNS TO A WARNING FOR THE SECOND STEP. NO LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE FIRST IT IS A PROBLEM THAT HAS PLAGUED CHRISTIANITY SINCE ITS BIRTH. HE WARNS THE FIRST CENTURY ROMANS

"BE NOT CONFORMED TO THE WORLD BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND, THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, OF WHAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT."

THE ANCIENT HEBREWS, BEFORE THEY OFFERED A ~~EXX~~ SACRIFICE WERE COMPELLED TO BE SURE THEIR SACRIFICIAL OBJECT WAS PERFECT, OR AS NEARLY PERFECT AS POSSIBLE, ONLY THE BEST SHEEP, GOATS AND OXEN WERE USED. THE PREFERRED OBJECT WAS A SNOWY WHITE LAMB, SYMBOLIZING THAT THEY HAD PURGED THEMSELVES OF ALL THE DARK SPOTS AND STAINS OF EVIL BEFORE PRESENTING THEMSELVES TO GOD.

ALTHOUGH THE FORM HAS CHANGED THE ESSENCE OF THE SACRAMENT IS THE SAME, PAUL POINTS OUT TO THE ROMANS. HUMAN LIVES AS THEY ARE ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, FOR IN EACH MAN, PAUL SO VIVIDLY POINTS OUT, ARE THE STRAINS OF PRIDE AND RELUCTANCE TO GIVE OF ~~THEMSELVES~~ HIMSELF.

IN THE SECOND VERSE OF THE PASSAGE I AM REFERRING TO PAUL ELUCIDATES ONE OF THE PERSISTANT THREATS TO A DEDICATED LIFE THEN AND NOW, THE PULL OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT IS LIVED.

A FEW WEEKS AGO I ~~DISCUSSED~~ ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM OF A SECULAR CHRISTMAS, HOW WE HAVE TOTALLY CONFORMED TO THE CULTURE AROUND US, EVEN IN CLEBRATING THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD. THIS PROBLEM IS NOT CONFINED TO CHRISTMAS ALONE. AT ALL TIMES WE ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN THE DEMANDS OF OUR ~~DAILY LIVING~~ SOCIETY AND OUR FAITH.

IN AMERICA, ~~MXXXXM~~ MORE THAN ~~ANY~~ OTHER COUNTRY ON THE EARTH, THE TENDENCY TO ~~CONFORM~~ IS PREVELANT. THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT GOES DEEP INTO THE CULTURAL AND

SOCIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE. ALL I WANT TO DO THIS MORNING, HOWEVER, IS TO POINT IT OUT, TO SHOW HOW CONFORMISM CONSTITUTES THE GRAVEST DANGER EVER FACED BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

WE ARE THE MOST CONFORMING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. WE WEAR THE SAME CLOTHES, MORE AND MORE WE DRIVE THE SAME KIND OF CARS, THROUGH TELEVISION WE ARE TOLD THAT EVERYBODY USES THIS PRODUCT AND OBEDIENTLY WE JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON. ONE HAS ONLY TO DRIVE THROUG ANY SUBURBAN AREA TO DISCOVER THAT MODERN AMERICANS DON'T MIND LIVING IN THE SAME KIND OF HOUSE AS THEIR NEIGHBORS AND AS FAR AS THAT GOES THE SAME AS EVERYONE IN THE ENTIRE AREA.

NOW THIS IN ITSELF IS NOT PARTICULARLY BAD BUT IT DOES POINT TO A SUBTLE AND DEEPER AFFLICTION THAT AS A NATION AND INDIVIDUALLY WE ARE LOSING THE ABILITY TO THINK FOR OURSELVES.

AT THIS POINT ST. PAUL SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO 20th CENTURY AMERICA, FOR THIS CONFORMISM HAS GRADUALLY INFILTRATED INTO THE CHURCHES. IT IS A RARE THING FOR A CHURCH TO TAKE A STRONG STAND ON ANY SOCIAL ISSUE. TO BE SURE THEIR ARE SOME THAT DO, BUT THOSE ARE THE EXCEPTION.

PROBABLY THE EXTREME EXAMPLE OF AN ACULTURTATED, CONFORMING CHURCH IS THE GERMAN CHURCH DURING THE RISE OF THE NAZI REGIME. SO BOUND HAND AND FOOT TO THE CULTURE AND HISTORY OF THE GERMAN NATION WERE THEY THAT THEY BARELY LIFTED A FINGER AGAINST

THE MOST BARBARIC DEMONSTRATION MANKIND HAS EVER SEEN.

WHEN A NAZI CRONIE TOLD A COUNCIL OF GERMAN CHURCH MEN THAT JSUS CHRIST WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT A JEW BUT AN ARYAN THEY CHEERED. WHEN LATER THE PARTY INFORMED THE CHURCH THAT THE GERMANS HAD BECOME THE CHOSEN PEOPLE, THAT THE INCARNATION HAD OCCURRED IN THEIR MIDST IN THEIR SAVIOR AND MESSIAH ADOLF HITLER THEY SAID AMEN.

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY AS NEVER BEEN PUT TO SUCH AN OVERT TEST, BUT THERE IS GOOD REASON TO DOUBT WHETHER WE WOULD REACT MUCH DIFFERENTLY THAN THE GERMAN CHURCH IF WE WERE.

THE PRESENT PROBLEM IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH PRESENTS MUCH THE SAME SITUATION AND FULLY ILLUSTRATES HOW PEOPLE ARE UTTERLY BOUND TO A CULTURE. WHEN THE DEMANDS OF THE CULTURE CONFLICT WITH CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTIANITY MUST GO. THE PEOPLE IN ATHENS, GEORGIA AND NEW ORLEANS ARE NO LESS DEVOUT THAN WE. THEY GO TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY AND REPEAT THE EMPTY PHRASES ABOUT THE UNITY OF MANKIND, THAT ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS UNDER THE CREATOR AND HEAVENLY FATHER. BUT THEY STILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO DRIVE TWO OF THESE BROTHERS OUT OF THEIR UNIVERSITY, OR TO LINE THE STREETS HOWLING AND SCREAMING IN RAGE AT A MINISTER WHO TOOK SERIOUSLY THE DEMANDS OF HIS FAITH AND ESCORTED HIS DAUGHTER TO SCHOOL IN THE FACE OF AN ALL WHITE BOYCOTT. THIS IS THE SAME CULTURAL CONFORMISM THAT LED GERMAN CHRISTIANS TO BOYCOTT THE JEWS, THEN TO DRIVE THEM OUT

OF THEIR HOMES AND ULTIMATELY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM BY MASSACURING SIX MILLION OF THEM. THIS IS CULTURAL CONFORMISM AND IT DIFFERS IN DEGREE ONLY FROM WHAT WE MUST FACE TODAY.

PAUSE

THE BASIC ISSUE IS THIS, WHEN WE PRESENT OUR OFFERINGS TO GOD, WE ARE PRESENTING OURSELVES, OUR LIVES. WE ARE PROMISING GOD THAT OUR LIVES ARE DEDICATED TO HIM AND HIM ALONE AND THAT WE WILLNEVER COMFORM TO ANYTHING THAT CONFLICTS WITH OUR FAITH. WE ARE SOLEMLY ADITTING THAT EVERYTHING WE DO WILL BE DETERMINED BY THAT MOMENT IN OUR WORSHIP WHEN WE TURN OURSELVES OVER TO GOD.

THIS IS THE GROUNDWORK OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE, IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN THIS IS WHEREWE MUST BEGIN.

THIS MORNING AND EACH TIME WE JOIN TOGETHER IN THE ACT OF DEDICATION LET US BE ~~ERXX~~ FULLY AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STEP, REALIZING THAT HAVING DONE IT WE ARE GOD'S, THAT WE CAN NO LONGER CONFORM TO THE WORLD AROUND US, BUT ONLY TO HIS WILL. THEN, HUMBLY AND PRAYERFULLY WE MAY WALK OUT INTO THE WORLD, TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN LIFE BECAUSE AS HE FIRST DID FOR US, WE IN TURN HAVE DONE PRESENTEDOURSELVES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE ..

AMEN.